

Disability and caring among families with children: Family employment and poverty characteristics

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Summary

Household characteristics of disabled people and carers

- Overall, disabled people are more likely to live alone and less likely to be a parent of dependent¹ children. Among adults of working age (16-59/64), 27 per cent of disabled people have dependent children, compared with 38 per cent of those without a similar health problem.²
- Disabled people also tend to be older as a group than non-disabled people. Within given age groups there was little association between disability and having dependent children.
- As well as coming from small households, disabled people are also more likely to come from households with over six people.
- Analysis of Families and Childrens Study (FACS) found that 10 per cent of all families with children have a disabled child who they report needs extra help and support owing to their disability. About five per cent of families have more than one disabled child (longstanding illness definition).
- Children are least likely to be reported as disabled if they are living with a married couple, compared to those living with cohabiting couples or lone parents. Over 40 per cent of disabled lone parents report having a disabled child.

¹ The definition of dependent child is a child aged under 16 years, or aged 16-19 in full-time education.

² Source is Family Resources Survey 2004-05

- There is no marked difference between the proportion of women and men with responsibility for caring. The incidence of caring rises with age until retirement then appears to drop.

Relationships between disability and caring characteristics among household members

- There does not appear to be a strong association between partners' disability status within couples – e.g. one partner's disability status (e.g. whether an individual is disabled) does not help predict the disability status of the other partner. Five per cent of couples with dependent children contain partners who are both disabled. If two adults were drawn at random, and did not cluster with those with similar characteristics, then 3.4 per cent of couples would contain partners who were both disabled.
- There is a slightly stronger association between parent and child disability. If an adult and child were drawn from FACS at random, 4.5 per cent of 'families' would contain a disabled mother and child. In fact, 7.3 per cent of families contain both disabled mothers and children. There could be a number of explanations for this including the hereditary nature of some impairments, shared environmental factors and consistent bias in reporting.

Family employment

- Child disability has a negative effect on paid work for both lone parents and couple mothers. Having a disabled child has the strongest negative effects on full-time work, and it also slightly reduces part-time work.
- The effect of having a disabled child on mother's work varies by definition of childhood disability. The strongest effects can be detected where the respondent reports that their child's disability affects her ability to work (as would be expected), however all childhood definitions have some negative effect on rates of paid work for mothers – most notably problems which are reported to affect the child's ability to attend school, and general health reported as 'not good'. This is a fairly subjective measure of health – but may indicate that recent changes and conditions can have an important effect on work.
- Most fathers work full-time hours and having a disabled child does not have much impact. However, there is a small impact on full-time working, and unsurprisingly it is the kind of child disability that is reported to affect the ability of parents to work is most likely to be associated with lower rates of employment among fathers.
- Couples with a disabled child are less likely to both work, compared to those with no disabled child. Furthermore, almost twice as many couples with a disabled child are workless, compared to those without. However, the effect on employment of having any child needing extra help is greater than that of having a disabled child – suggesting that parents are caring for this group of children.
- Single-earner couples slightly outnumber dual-earner couples amongst this group of parents who have a child who needs extra help and support because of their disability – which is the reverse of the trend for parents of non-disabled children. The proportion of workless couples is almost three times that of couples who do not have a disabled child (13 per cent compared to five per cent).
- The likelihood of work falls as caring responsibilities increase. Those with caring responsibilities under 20 hours a week are at least as likely to work as the population as a whole, and slightly more likely to work if they are also parents. Caring responsibilities between 20 and 49 hours a week halve the odds of work participation, and caring for over 50 hours halve the odds yet again. In addition male carers are less likely to work than female carers, which is at odds with the effect of childhood disability where the main effect is on mothers' employment.
- The effect of disability and caring on family employment depends on how many members of the family are disabled and/or caring. If the respondent and someone else in the household are disabled, the odds of working are much reduced. This is the case irrespective of whether respondent and child, or respondent and partner are disabled. Conversely, if just someone else in the household has a disability, but the respondent does not, then the odds of working were significantly increased. This is an 'added worker' effect, indicating that the disability status of one parent can perhaps encourage the other to stay in paid work (though with no such effect applying for having disabled child). Where the respondent and another person in the household are both carers then individual rates of paid work are reduced.
- Carers who work differ from those who do not. Working carers tend to live with the person who they provide care for. They also often have someone for whom care is shared, either inside or outside the household. Working carers tend to have higher qualifications than those not working. They are more likely than all carers to be single, and more likely to be female. For those caring for longer, qualifications appear to become even more important, and there is also evidence of regional variation, suggesting that availability of jobs could be a factor.
- Disability status has no clear effect on couple mothers and lone parent employment rates, but there was a distinct effect of having

disabled children. Where any child needed extra care, mothers in paid work tend to be working for six hours less than other mothers, controlling for all other factors. For fathers the effect of their own disability status and children's disability status was more connected to the decision about whether to work at all, rather than the amount of work that was done.

Family poverty characteristics

- The effect of disability on total family income³ differs for couples and lone parents. In general lone parents' incomes do not tend to vary much – the effect of income-related benefits and tax credits. Disability has only a relatively small effect on this group, lowering median incomes only slightly. It is possible that the effect of additional disability benefits mitigates the size of any effects on income.
- Among couples with children, disability appears to have significant effects on the distribution of incomes. Where family members are disabled (either adults or children) average (median) incomes are reduced and in particular the chances of having a high income are much reduced. Among couples, the effect of being a carer appears to depress incomes more than disability.

³ These results do not factor in any increased costs in disability. These results are equalised for family size, but not for costs associated with disability or caring. There are a number of reasons why families with disabled members may have lower incomes and higher costs, some of which are not directly related to disability or which are themselves associated with disability (such as low qualifications).

- Disabled people who are inactive (e.g. neither working nor actively seeking work) are much less likely to be materially deprived⁴ than those without a disability who are inactive. The difference may reflect the range of additional help available to disabled people. However, overall (including those in work) disabled people are more than twice as likely to experience material hardship as those who are not disabled.
- Disabled people are more likely to report that they cannot afford most goods on the deprivation scale than non-disabled people.⁵ Those not working are worst off in most areas – for example around 50 per cent of those who are not in work and have a disability could not afford to save for a rainy day, compared to around 35 per cent of those who are not disabled and not working.

⁴ This is defined as lacking two or more necessities through an inability to afford such goods.

⁵ The data sources for analyses of deprivation for disabled people and carers are not the same, and this is reflected in the quite different results. The source for disability analysis is PSE 1999, and the source for carers' analysis is FACS. Results are for families with dependent children in both cases. It is inevitable that a number of different datasets must be used to cover the range of different questions of interest. No one dataset contains all the information required. For instance the 2001 Census micro-data has a large sample size but relatively little detail. FACS has several different measures of disability, but many fewer respondents. The use of several different datasets does make for a more complex overall picture, however, and we indicate the source of information used for each analysis.

- Disabled people who are working are better off than those who aren't working, however they are in a similar position to non-disabled people who are not working, in many areas. For example almost 40 per cent of disabled people who are not working cannot afford fruit and vegetables, compared to around a quarter of working disabled people. However the proportion of working disabled people who cannot afford fruit and vegetables (27 per cent) is comparable to rate for non working non-disabled people (26 per cent) and lower than the rate for working non-disabled people (19 per cent).
- Carers also experience higher rates of deprivation which varied according to their working status. Carers who are not working are amongst the worst off in some areas – for example, around one third of non-working carers can not afford two pairs of shoes for each adult in the family, compared to around a quarter of those not in work, who are not caring. Carers who are working are better-off than non-carers who are not working, for example, only seven per cent can not afford two pairs of shoes for adults in the family. However, working carers are generally worse off than working adults without caring responsibilities.

The full report of these research findings is published for the Department for Work and Pensions by Corporate Document Services (ISBN 978 1 84712 277 3. Research Report 460. October 2007). It is available from Paul Noakes at the address below.

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